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## NOTICES OF NEW BOOKS.

*L'Énergie Spirituelle, Essais et Conférences.* Par HENRI BERGSON. Librairie Félix Alcan, Paris, 1919.—pp. ii, 227.

The first feeling called forth by an examination of Bergson's book, which, though in its second edition, will be new to most readers, is one of disappointment. With the publication of *L'Évolution Créatrice* nearly fifteen years ago Bergson had given us the third of a series of notable books in philosophy and had set forth the main principles of a philosophic system, which, whether true or false, could not be ignored. Men who valued genuine philosophic thinking looked forward with eagerness to a fourth and perhaps a fifth book, which should complete the exposition and carry the principles involved into other fields. Each of the volumes already published had been the product of ten years of work and intellectual experience, and had contained little or nothing that its author had later needed to retract or modify. The standard set had been a high one. We were accordingly not disposed to be satisfied with anything inferior, and were willing to wait another ten years for a book that should be worthy of its predecessors. We have waited in vain; and in the meantime the whole intellectual world has been profoundly stirred by the events of the Great War. All our standards of valuation, logical, ethical, social, what you will, have been and are still being tested, and many of them have been found wanting. Only once or twice in the course of history has there been a period when men's minds were so shaken, and when so much of what had seemed certain threatened to dissolve into fancy or prejudice or downright falsehood. All this ferment has added to our eagerness. How has the War with its problems affected one of our few original thinkers? Some effect it must have had. What is his standpoint now and what may be expected from him in the future?

With all this in mind it is necessarily a disappointment to discover that *L'Énergie Spirituelle* is merely a collection of articles and conferences already given to the public in one form or another. Moreover, though they cover a considerable period of time, ranging from 1901 to 1913, they are all dated before the War. They answer none of our questions, they leave our expectations unfulfilled. This is not the book for which we have been waiting, and which we think our author is bound to give us, if he is able to do so. Nevertheless, what we have is worthy of examination. The author says that it is the first of two projected volumes, intended to make accessible to French readers what has been scattered through periodicals or printed in English. The present collection includes those articles which deal with psychological subjects; the second is to be devoted to metaphysics. Of the seven titles now before us, the first and the third were originally given as addresses before English audiences, *La conscience et la vie* being the Huxley lecture of 1911, *Fantômes des vivants* the address given at London before the Society for Psychical Research

on the occasion of assuming its presidency. The former, we are told, is partly a translation and partly a development of the lecture as originally given. The changes, however, are not of much importance, since, while they add a certain amount of detail and explanation, they do not throw any new light upon the author's theories. With regard to the *Fantômes des vivants*, one is struck afresh by the contention that the method for the investigation of such cases must always be historical rather than scientific, in the more limited sense of the latter term; that is, that the phenomena to be dealt with are concrete and individual, not abstractions which may be indefinitely repeated; and that the failure to recognize this distinction accounts for most of the opposition and indifference to psychical research. No doubt to a certain extent the contention is true; each case must be considered upon its own merits before its distinctive characteristics can be determined, and in so far it is a unique event to be tested by the ordinary laws of evidence; but the difficulty of such determination is enormously increased by the fact that as a rule the essential part of the phenomenon is open to only one observer and usually takes place under circumstances peculiarly unfavourable to accurate observation. Moreover, the investigator rarely fails to make use of his single and unique case as if it were one of a series, upon the basis of which predictions can be made and general laws formulated. Consequently, the mistaken method deprecated by Bergson is due, it seems to me, to the enthusiastic believer even more than to the sceptical opponent. In fact, the procedure can hardly be avoided in those inquiries which deal with the question as to whether or not a given event is possible; that is, whether the probability against it is not so overwhelmingly great as to make investigation a piece of foolishness. One does not need to be a member of the Society for Psychical Research to recognize the desirability of a more humble attitude in this respect on the part of many historians, even those dealing with more prosaic subjects than phantoms; but nevertheless the question cannot be ignored altogether, unless one is willing to go back to the historical methods of Herodotus;—and even Herodotus occasionally said that while his readers might believe his stories if they liked, for his part he would do nothing of the kind.

With the exception of these two addresses, the other articles in the book deal with subjects that are closely related to the author's previous treatise *Matière et Mémoire*. They do not present any addition to the general principles there set forth, although occasionally there is a gain in clearness of presentation. Their titles, *L'âme et le corps*, *Le rêve*, *Le souvenir du présent et la fausse reconnaissance*, *L'effort intellectuel*, and *Le cerveau et la pensée* show the range of the book. The articles have been well chosen, and are given a certain unity by the fact that everywhere the author's interest is not so much in the psychological fact as in the possible explanation that may be found for it in his general theories. Altogether the book is well worth the reading, and will be a convenience to those who have desired to have the best of Bergson's slighter works in more permanent form; but nevertheless this is not the book for which we have been waiting. When will Bergson give it to us?

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